

May 15, 2019

**Ex Parte**

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12th Street SW  
Washington, DC 20554

Re: *Transforming the 2.5 GHz Band*, WT Docket No. 18-120

Dear Ms. Dortch:

On Monday, May 14, 2019, Rick Torstrick and Michael Brock of Harlan2Way Communications in Harlan, KY; Carrie Scott and Richard Scott of Countrymen Communications in Lewisburg, WV; Robert Finch, Director, Educators and Broadband Providers for American Rural Communities (“EBPARC”); and Stephanie Weiner, Counsel for Voqal, the North American Catholic Educational Programming Foundation, Inc., and Mobile Beacon held separate meetings with Aaron Goldberger, Wireless Advisor to Chairman Pai, and Will Adams, Legal Advisor to Commissioner Carr. Also on that day, Alan Hill of J.A. Hill Group, LLC joined Mr. Torstrick, Mr. Brock, Ms. Scott, Mr. Scott, and Mr. Finch for a meeting with Commissioner Michael O’Rielly and his Wireless Advisor, Erin McGrath.

In these meetings, the parties discussed issues raised in EBPARC’s previous filings in this proceeding.<sup>1</sup> In particular, Harlan2Way Communications and Countrymen Communications are two of the 57 rural wireless internet service providers that recently urged the Commission to make available new Educational Broadband Service (EBS) licenses to educators via priority licensing windows.<sup>2</sup> The owners of these two companies—which serve some of the hardest to reach areas of Kentucky and West Virginia—discussed the lack of *any* high quality, affordable broadband service in the majority of the area in their communities today. They explained that access to available 2.5 GHz spectrum, through partnerships with educational licensees via priority windows rather than auctions, would allow them to quickly and cost-effectively deploy service and educational benefits to their long unserved communities.

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<sup>1</sup> See generally Comments of EBPARC, WT Docket 18-120 (filed Aug. 7, 2018); Reply Comments of EBPARC, WT Docket 18-120 (filed Sept. 7, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> See Letter from 57 Rural Broadband Operators, EBPARC, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WT Docket No. 18-120 (filed Apr. 30, 2019).

Sincerely,

Robert Finch  
Director  
Educators and Broadband Providers for Rural  
American Communities

Attachments

Cc: Commissioner Michael O'Rielly  
Erin McGrath  
Aaron Goldberger  
Will Adams

## **High Speed INTERNET Need and Availability:**

Reliable, high-speed INTERNET needs to exist in every county of the Bluegrass State, and we as supporters of 2.5 EBS Licensing for Educational Institutions and Non-Profits say this project will be the key for profound and sweeping growth in job creation, health access ( Tele-medicine ) and education. The benefits of good Internet connectivity will break down geographic and financial barriers to education and economic development by providing access to affordable high-quality INTERNET service to connect Harlan County, Kentucky with the world.

As of January 16, 2017, according to broadband now.com no one in Harlan County has a fiber optic broadband connection and 27,000 do not have access to 25mbps wired broadband access. Almost 65% of consumers in Kentucky have access to a wired connection with speeds faster than 25 Mbps and only 7.4% have access to 100mbps or faster. Harlan, Kentucky has a total of 7 INTERNET providers, AT&T., Via Sat Inc., East Kentucky Network, LLC., Verizon Communications Inc., Harlan Community Television Inc., and Windstream Inc., only one of these being a locally owned and operated business.

Adequate INTERNET is now becoming an economic lifeline with the decline of the coal industry in the Harlan County area. Recently the Federal Communications Commission increased the broadband standard to 25 Mbps, which means most Harlan Countians do not have service at the minimum level.

The potential for every Harlan Countian to tap into the global market, compete for better paying jobs, collaborate with clients all over the United States and throughout the world, take classes online, access increased medical care make reliable Internet one of the most important infrastructure projects in our state's history.

In some rural areas of Harlan County less than 50% of the population have access to even basic or first generation INTERNET connections. These communities are at risk for:

- Education shortfalls: Students unable to access the INTERNET to do schoolwork.

- Business unable to stay competitive: Without access to high speed INTERNET, businesses are unable to participate in online business activities.
- Economic development disadvantage: Attracting and retaining new businesses is difficult, if better INTERNET access is available elsewhere.
- Inability to retain population: Workers and businesses may move to other regions offering better INTERNET access.

Each community in Harlan County faces different challenges, constraints and opportunities. Usually rural communities face one or more of the following broadband access issues:

- Lack of INTERNET availability in the communities.
- Lack of very high speed broadband for commercial areas and community anchor institutions: Broadband Internet services generally exist in almost all town centers, neighborhoods and community anchor institutions Libraries, schools, health facilities, and public safety services. Nonetheless some communities may feel that a higher level of broadband services is required to address their community economics.

Public access sites that include Wi-Fi access, computer terminals, and assistance in accessing e-government services. These sites usually consist of libraries, community centers, and schools and may simply not be present in some areas of the county or have very restrictive hours.

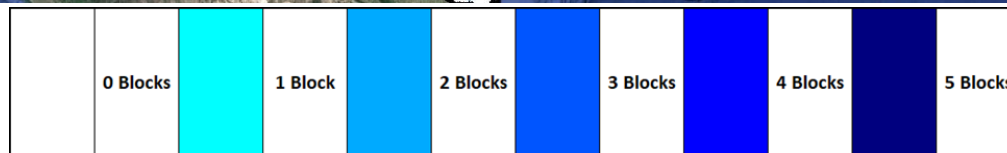
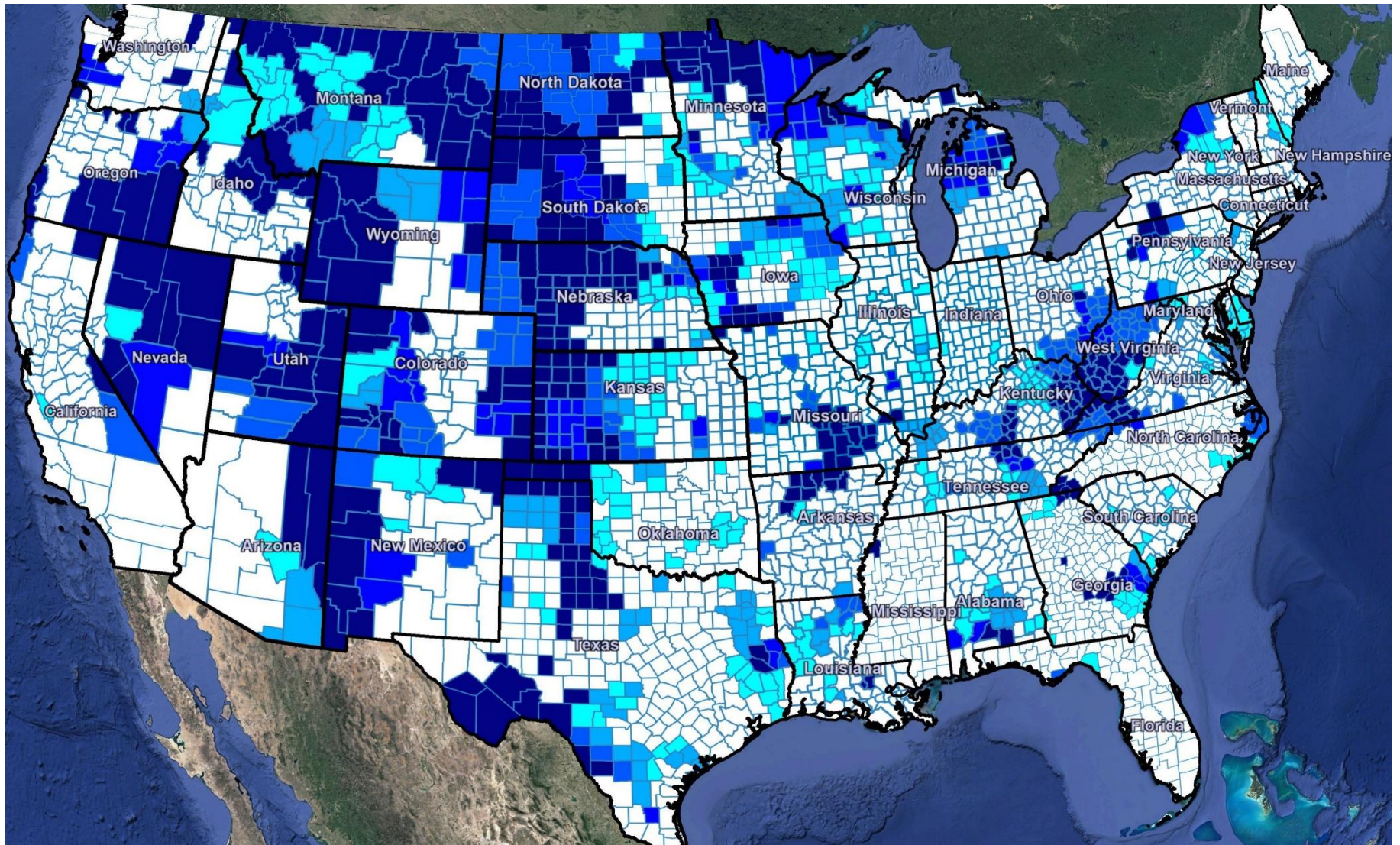
Hot spots in strategic locations in a community. Hot spots consist of areas within a community that are covered by free Wi-Fi. These hot spots are usually not associated with any computer terminals or personal support. People bring their own devices. Hot spots provide locals and visitors with convenient access to the INTERNET. Hot spots can be used by students after school, tourists, and broad range residents.

Adequate INTERNET access is necessary for the growth of economy in Harlan County and computer literacy is essential for the Students as well as the adults in Harlan County. Here are some of the ways to insure this outcome:

- All the schools throughout the Harlan County District make use of their computer labs teaching the basics and advanced skill courses.
- The Community college and technical schools offer classes in computer science and literacy to all its students.
- Local Church organizations and non-profits offer basic computer operational skill classes.
- Allowing educational institutions and educational non-profits to apply for and receive EBS licenses will be a key first step to accomplishing these goals rapidly through partnerships with operators that are willing to build fixed wireless networks to bring the needed services to local communities.

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## Expected New EBS Licenses Available by County in the 48 States





## Kentucky 2.5 GHz Expansion

County Impact of FCC Notice of Proposed Rulemaking  
(WT Docket No. 18-120): "Transforming the 2.5 GHz Band"

### Legend

- 0 Blocks
- 1 Block
- 2 Blocks
- 3 Blocks
- 4 Blocks
- 5 Blocks

